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For Immediate Release

F AREA MARKS 50 YEARS SINCE OPERATIONS BEGAN

AIKEN, S.C., Nov. 3, 2004 – History was made at the Savannah River Site (SRS) 50 years ago, when F Canyon became the world's first operational full-scale PUREX separation plant on Nov. 4, 1954. PUREX, or plutonium and uranium extraction, was the process used to extract plutonium and uranium products from materials irradiated in SRS reactors.

This historical milestone was accomplished quietly, behind the secure fences of what was then the Savannah River Plant, as the United States was developing materials for nuclear weapons at the massive complex built by E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co. for the United States Atomic Energy Commission, now known as the U.S. Department of Energy.

Construction started in February 1951, and the first reactor – R Reactor – began operations in December 1953. On the evening of Nov. 4, 1954, F Canyon – a 128,000-square-foot facility used to process plutonium and other materials for the national defense– received its first material from R Reactor and placed it in its dissolver, which was part of the canyon's chemical separation process that ultimately produced plutonium metal for the nation's defense. SRS's first plutonium product was shipped to Rocky Flats, in Colorado, Dec. 28, 1954.

"F Canyon was a linchpin in the DOE complex for nearly a half-century," says Bob McQuinn, who manages F Area Closure Projects for Westinghouse Savannah River Company (WSRC). "This facility produced one-third of the nation's plutonium over its years of operation. We're proud to pay tribute to the accomplishments of the dedicated men and women who preceded us and now to those of us concluding the mission."

Operations concluded in F Canyon in March 2002. In FB Line, the canyon's sister facility where plutonium finishing operations historically took place, all remaining materials are being stabilized and packaged for long-term storage. This work is expected to be complete, and both facilities ready for final deactivation, by March 2005.

"I can't say enough about the way the people in F Area have gotten their work done," says Jack DeVine, WSRC's Chief Closure Officer. "F Area facilities led the way in the 1950s, and now they're again leading the way through their excellent, pace-setting deactivation work."

SRS is owned by the U.S. Department of Energy and operated by a team of contractors led by Westinghouse Savannah River Company.

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THE WSRC TEAM

Westinghouse Savannah River Company LLC · Bechtel Savannah River, Inc. · BNFL Savannah River Corporation
BWXT Savannah River Company · CH2 Savannah River Company · Polestar Savannah River Company